

A Video Case for Bringing Commuter Rail Service to Southeastern Massachusetts

In January 2009, under the leadership of Roger Williams University journalism professor Michael Scully, a team of nine students participated in a project called Planet Forward. (www.planetforward.org for more information) They were charged with producing a series of short, web videos on ways to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels. As they researched a variety of sustainability projects at RWU, they learned of a class project in the University's School of Architecture, Art and Historic Preservation where students were developing proposals for building a commuter rail station to serve Fall River and New Bedford, Mass.

Based on preliminary conversations with architecture professor Edgar Adams, they determined that it would be very difficult to produce a video about a train station that didn't exist yet. However, Professor Scully was invited to a presentation in the Architecture School where two fourth-year students, Jon Archbald and Jessie Davey-Mallo, showed their renderings of a train station they'd designed for the Whale's Tooth site in New Bedford. It was at that moment that Professor Scully saw the potential of the project and brought it back to the Planet Forward team for consideration.

Senior Michelle Bazinet, a Massachusetts native, was assigned to research the topic, to identify and involve public officials who would be willing to speak about the project's potential and then produce a video that would make a fact-based, compelling, visual argument for creating a commuter rail station at the Whale's Tooth site.

On her own initiative, Michelle went to the Lakeville town hall, where the clerk provided her with Kristina Egan's contact information. Kristina is the south coast rail manager for the Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation. Michelle then involved others on the team, Kyle Toomey and Stephen DePasquale, and the three students drove to Boston and interviewed Ms. Egan. They filmed her on the Boston Common, clearly articulating the case for, and the many benefits of, bringing commuter rail service to these underserved areas. Ms. Egan then invited them to join her at a meeting of the Southeastern Massachusetts Commuter Rail Task Force that was being held in Taunton, to learn more about the parameters of the project. Michelle, Kyle and a third student, Mike Spark, did so.

Needing more content for the video, Kyle and Michelle contacted Jon Archbald and asked to view the renderings he had produced, which at the time were two-dimensional images on his computer. Wanting animation to truly make the "before and after" point, the entire team met, looked at Jon and Jessie's work and together they discovered an option on his computer program that allowed him to turn the two-dimensional renderings into the fluid animation that is included in the final video. The very next day, that portion of the piece was complete.

The final pieces soon fell into place. Michelle and Kyle took Jon to the Whale's Tooth Site to shoot his standup remarks. They then filmed the opening, still photos of the site and the surrounding neighborhoods, and B-roll along Route 24 and a nearby train station.

It was at that point that all of the raw video footage was turned into a four-minute piece – a collaborative storyboarding and editing effort involving Michelle, Kyle and Mike. The original music was written and produced by Kyle specifically for this project.

As the entire Planet Forward team had a hand in this project, all of their names are listed here:

Michael Scully
Assistant Professor

Michelle Bazinet '09
Communications

Kyle Toomey '09
Journalism

Michael Spark '09
Global Communications

Stephen DePasquale '10
Journalism

Codie Eisenberg '09
Communications

Jillian MacDonald '09
Communications

Lorin Richardson '09
Journalism

Kristen Seturins '09
Communications

In addition, the following two architecture students provided critical content:

Jon Archbault '10
Architecture

Jessie Davey-Mallo '
Architecture